"O may this be
a day much to be remembered
to the Lord hereafter
by me and by many."

John Newton, Liverpool, 4 August 1758

"... a remarkable document... Any candidate for an ordained ministry in the twenty-first century could well profit from studying the process John Newton put himself through two hundred and fifty years ago. "
Jonathan Aitken

"John Newton's reflections on the nature and execution of Christian ministry remain as relevant today... The opportunity to sit at his feet once again is not one which should be missed."
Michael Cassidy

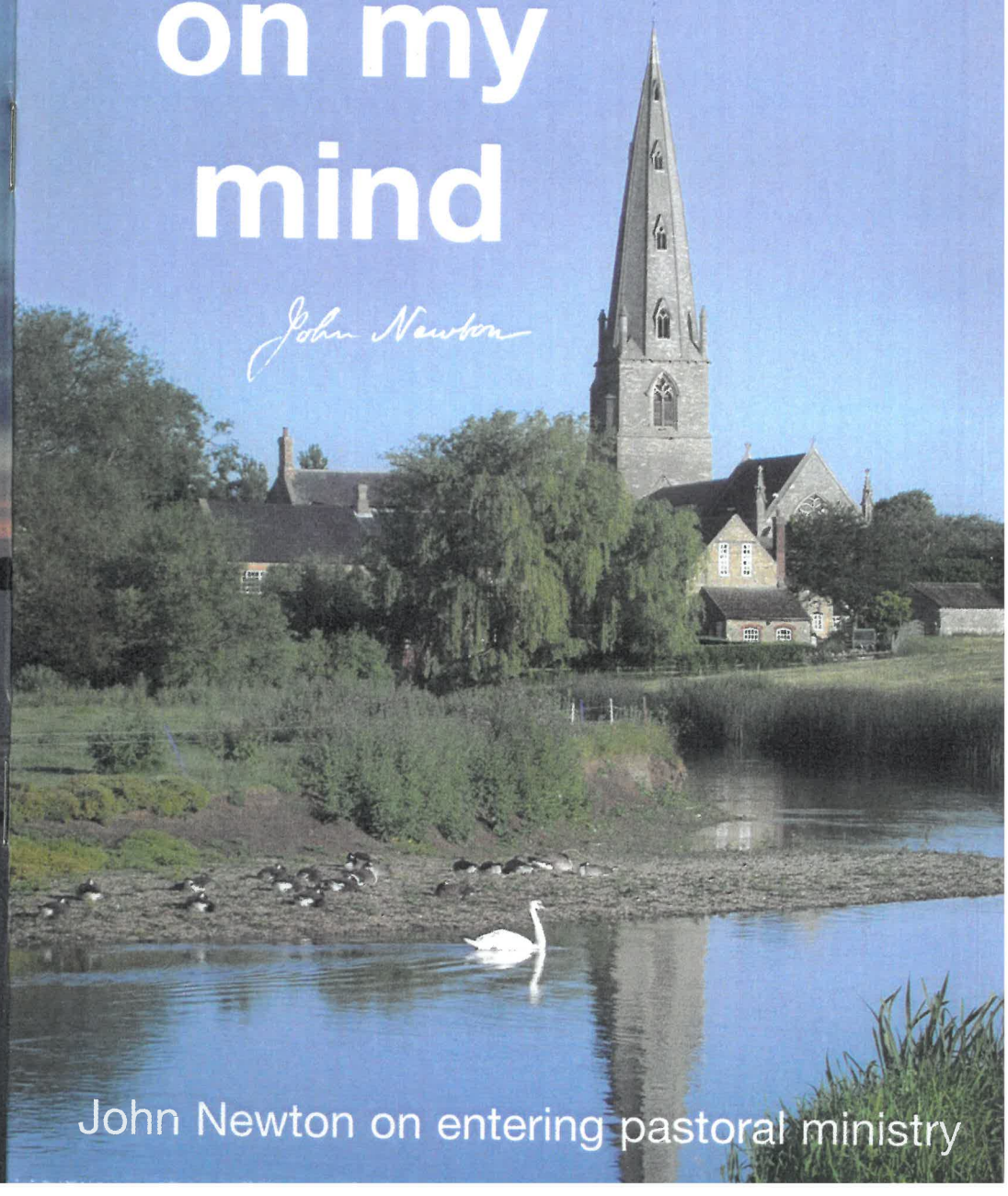
"... a man of deep spirituality, wide scriptural knowledge, and an unusual depth of longing to serve God ponders the nature of a true calling... These thoughts should be required reading for all Christians... specially for those who are given the unspeakable privilege of 'full-time service'."
Alec Motyer

"It is hard to believe that any Christians, wondering if God was calling them to ordained service, ever meditated on relevant Scriptures so perceptively, and recorded their discernments so luminously ...a very precious part of the legacy of this great man of God."
James I Packer

The view from Newton's office as Surveyor of Tides in Liverpool

Ministry on my mind

John Newton



John Newton on entering pastoral ministry

Ministry on my mind

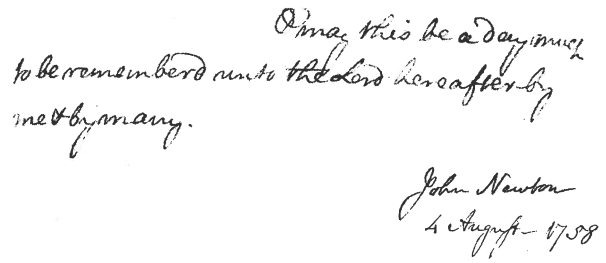
John Newton on entering pastoral ministry

John Newton

Transcribed by Marylynn Rouse
as part of The Complete Works of John Newton
www.johnnewton.org

Written by John Newton in Liverpool in 1758 as
"Miscellaneous Thoughts and enquiries on an important subject"
in a journal now kept at Lambeth Palace Library.

Published here for the first time
on the 250th anniversary of Newton's call to the ministry.



Dedicated to the memory of

Sir Timothy Hoare Bt. OBE (1934-2008)

who was for many years tirelessly engaged in
the selection, training and support of candidates for the ordained ministry -
through his work on Church of England Selection Boards (ACCM/ABM),
the Crown Appointments Commission,
with Oak Hill Theological College, St. John's College, Durham,
and the Church Pastoral Aid Society Board of Patronage.

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Introduction

God met with John Newton during a great storm at sea in March 1748, but it was several years before he was really established as a growing disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. This happened initially through his discipling by Captain Alexander Clunie at St Kitts in 1754. Clunie's own pastor, Samuel Brewer of Stepney Independent Meeting, then became a wise teacher and friend. The following year Newton heard George Whitefield preach, and met him personally.

Only three years after this, and three years into his appointment as Tide Surveyor at Liverpool, Newton wrote down these "Miscellaneous Thoughts", as he considered whether the Lord was calling him to the pastoral ministry.

One of the great values of these remarkable pages is that they were written privately and never considered for publication. They are not intended as a systematic presentation of New Testament teaching on the nature of ministry. Rather, they are the totally honest and humble outpourings of a heart that is being drawn towards a ministry of God's Word, but desires only to do the Lord's will.

Newton examines his own heart, but above all he examines the scriptures to see how the Lord called and equipped others. He seeks to be realistic about the pressures ("O it is a most busy life"). He is also clear about the priorities in his teaching: the first is "the doctrine of Jesus Christ crucified".

On his thirty-third birthday, he rededicates himself to the Lord, "with a thankful heart humbly trusting that the Lord has accepted my desire and that in his good time he will both appoint me work, and furnish me with grace, wisdom and strength to perform it."

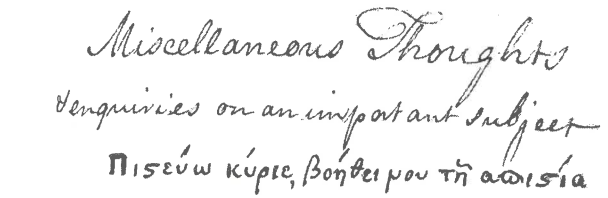
And in His way of time, and despite many difficulties, the Lord did just that.

Read this largely unknown gem for your great encouragement – not least if you should be wondering if John Newton's God of grace is calling you too to pastoral ministry today.

On behalf of all the Trustees of The John Newton Project, we say thank you to Marylynn Rouse for all her labour in producing this work for publication, as for all that she does in showing how relevant to today is John Newton's ministry and writing.

Tony Baker
Trustee
The John Newton Project

Commenced
Friday 23 June 1758



Mark 9:24
Lord I believe, help thou mine unbelief

O Lord, the fountain of wisdom, and the sure guide of those who depend on thee; thou hast promised that if we commit our ways to thee, thou wilt establish them, and if we trust in thee with all our hearts, thou wilt direct our steps – Lord I rely on this thy good word which has been tried and found faithful in every age. Vouchsafe to direct me by thy Spirit in the course of my present deliberations, and do thou lead me so to determine, as may be most agreeable to thy will, most conducive to thy glory. May my heart be divested of all prepossession and self-seeking, may I be enabled to see and to follow my duty; and may I maintain the comfortable testimony of a sincere, teachable and obedient conscience in thy sight. O may thy Spirit witness in my heart, and my conversation witness in the world, that I am indeed thy disciple, thine without reserve, thine and not another's, thine and not my own.

Amen.

It is now about 8 months since the conversation of some friends, led my thoughts to the __ [ministry]. The first mention made little impression on me, but in a small time it took firmer hold of my mind; and at length found a place in my prayers so far only, as to profess my readiness to enter on that service, if the Lord should at any time see fit to call, prepare and send me – in a little time this submission to be employed, improved into a wish and desire that I might, which still continues and increases. I have many times in this interval given myself to the Lord for his service – I hope without reserve or condition – and I referred myself to the time when I should be able to read a chapter in the Hebrew Bible with tolerable ease for a farther and close enquiry into this matter, in which I determined to join my own serious deliberations, the advice of my best and most judicious friends, and a course of prayer, and waiting upon the Lord.

By the divine blessing upon my studies I can now read a chapter etc, nearly in the manner I proposed. My birthday will return on August 4th; I determine by the grace

"...to consider at large the nature, dignity, difficulty and importance of the great undertaking I have in view"

of God to set apart the six ensuing weeks to that day, I mean so much of my time as I can conveniently command, to wait upon the Lord, to examine my own heart, to consider at large the nature, dignity, difficulty and importance of the great undertaking I have in view – and if after this term, I find my mind still engaged to the work, I intend to dedicate the day of my entrance upon a new year of life (my 34th)[1] to solemn fasting and prayer, in which I will endeavour to engage my dear Christian friends at London, Leeds, etc, to concur with me. I then propose to give myself up anew to God, and do humbly pray and believe that he will in his good time and way let me know that he has accepted me[2] – and will prevent me taking any hasty or disorderly steps, that may bring a reproach upon my profession or involve me in needless difficulties.

Amongst other means **I will endeavour to observe these**:

1. Besides bearing this concern upon my mind, as I shall be enabled in all my stated and occasional prayers – once a day at least **to bow my knees before the Lord** with a special reference to this.

2. To endeavour at **fixing my thoughts and meditations** to this point when I am in business or mixed company.

3. **To write down short observations upon such texts of scripture** as may occur to me as most pertinent to the case in hand, and such as may take in the compass of the subject – I set this book apart for this service.

4. I would resolve (O for grace from on high) **to enter immediately upon a ministerial deportment**, to lay aside from this day and for ever, whatever my conscience tells me would render me unsuitable to that high and holy calling.

5. **To study the Epistles to Timothy and Titus, my Lord's parting discourse in the 14th etc chapters of John, and the 1st epistle of John**, as portions of scripture especially suitable to my present occasion.

Saturday 24 June

2 Corinthians 2:16

And who is sufficient for these things?

The Greek word for *sufficient* here used has two or three significations in the New Testament – Matthew 3:11- Luke 22:38; Acts 20:37; Luke 23:9 - 2 Timothy 2:2. In this place the question may be considered as twofold: Who is worthy to bear the gospel message? or, Who is able to dispense it? Well may each be asked with respect to the best of men. Lord what can I answer to either?

1. **Who is worthy** thus to stand between the Lord and sinful man? Who is worthy to be the Lord's prophet – to approach the fountain of light and purity, to receive those communications which an unholy heart can neither receive or retain? Who shall ascend thus into the holy hill, that he may return among the people shining with a divine light, and enabled to give convincing evidence that the Lord has spoken to him and speaks by him of a truth?

   Who is worthy to be a priest of the Most High God – to present the offerings of a whole people – to intercede for them – to be the mouth, the hands, and the eyes of a congregation? If the Lord is to be sanctified by all that come near him – what clean hands, how pure a heart should he have who leads the way to others?

   To bring the first news of a Redeemer's entrance into a lost world, was the employment and the joy of angels. Who of all the sons of dust and ashes is worthy to complete their message? Alas! are sinners worthy to show forth the spotless Lamb of God? Are the labours of his life, the wonders of his love, the greatness of his sufferings, and the glories of his exaltation, suitable subjects for such cold hearts and stammering tongues as mine? O Lord I am unworthy, utterly unworthy of the meanest station in thy house, or the smallest service to thy people. And yet in one sense I have a fitness to spread the glad tidings of salvation which few can pretend to. If ever thou permittest me to declare that faithful saying, *Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners*; surely the words, *of whom I am chief*, would be peculiarly expressive and convincing in my mouth. I could stand forth and propose myself instead of a thousand arguments in proof of the doctrine, and might well hope to be of singular use as a pattern of thy longsuffering to all that should repent and believe.

"...I could stand forth and propose myself instead of a thousand arguments"

   Behold the height, the depth, of love divine
   He died for sin, for sins as dark as mine.

2. **Who is able** – who has either wisdom or strength for so great a work? What zeal, courage, diligence, faithfulness, tenderness, humility and self-denial are necessary to fill up all the various parts of the ministerial character. Whenever I think of a minister, I necessarily suppose such a one (if honoured and useful) must have an extensive knowledge of the scripture, a large stock of divine experience, an eminent degree of discernment and prudence, an ardent thirst for the glory of God, and the salvation of souls, and a readiness and aptitude to bring forth out of his treasures those instructions the Lord has given him, according as circumstances require either for stated or occasional services. And when such a one has filled up all his public work with propriety, I know he has done nothing, unless by a life of prayer, and waiting upon the Lord, he is continually watering the seed sown, and unless his converse and behaviour amongst his hearers, evidently savour of that universal holiness he recommends from the pulpit. I can easier conceive than express what continual need such a one will have of all the graces of the Spirit, to prevent him pulling down with one hand what he is attempting to build up with the other, while his calls to duty are so numerous and sudden, his temptations so peculiar, his hindrances so many, and corruptions still remaining in him as well as others. How much circumspection is necessary in him, who is placed in such a point of light, that all his actions pass under constant examination of multitudes, and is sure by every mistake at once to gratify the enemies of religion,[3] offend the consciences of the weak, and grieve the hearts of all that love the Lord and his truth?

Nor is the labour of this calling to be overlooked. It requires great strength both of mind and body, or at least extraordinary supplies and supports to each, to be living always upon the expense,[4] to be pressing, warning, beseeching every man, publicly, from house to house, in season, out of season. To be able to wrestle, with God, to pour forth strong prayers and supplications, in the assemblies, families etc - to improve every opportunity that may offer of an open door to extend the knowledge and savour of the Gospel into adjacent, perhaps into distant places[5] – O it is a most busy life – The Lord preserve me from entering upon it with confined or indolent aims: I cannot think of being a minister as some are, who yet I would hope are good. And yet when I look back upon what I have written, when I think seriously of what I am desirous to undertake, when I look at home upon what I am, and abroad upon what I am about to rush into, what can I return to the Apostle's question, *Who is sufficient?* O Lord do thou answer for me – had the matter depended in whole or in part upon any worthiness or ability in me, surely I had not proceeded thus far, surely I had rejected the very first suggestion with horror and astonishment. I confess O Lord there is no one more unfit than me, no one half so unworthy; but am not I in thy hand as clay in the hand of the Potter? Canst not

> "...no one more unfit than me, no one half so unworthy; but am not I in thy hand as clay in the hand of the Potter?"

thou turn me and mould me, frame me and strengthen me as thou wilt?[6] Is it hard for thee O Lord to make a crooked thing straight, to turn a wilderness into pools of water, and to cause the pine tree and the myrtle to spring up instead of thorns and brambles?[7] If it shall please thee O Lord to magnify thy mercy to a poor wretch, who not long since was possessed by a legion of unclean spirits, wounding and tearing himself and all about him; if it seem good unto thee not only to restore such a one to his right mind, but likewise to send him on a gracious errand to his friends and neighbours, and give him charge and power to declare wherever he comes what great things thou hast done for him:[8] if this seem good in thy sight who shall object! Will thy people repine? Nay, surely, they will rejoice and glorify in my behalf; will sinners take exceptions at such a messenger: or rather when they see one of their fellow criminals, a very ringleader in rebellion, a traitor and apostate sent back with life, pardon, and honour, will they not be the more readily inclined from the circumstances of the case to believe the testimony I shall be enabled to bear of thy long-suffering, forbearance, and mercy, and truth?[9] O Lord I lay myself low before thee; call, and I will answer; send and I will go, but O let thy presence go with me, and fill me with thy peace in the way; let me know thou hast accepted me, and encourage me to go forth, and to go on, and to hold out to the end, for thy name's sake.

Amen.[10]

Monday 26 June

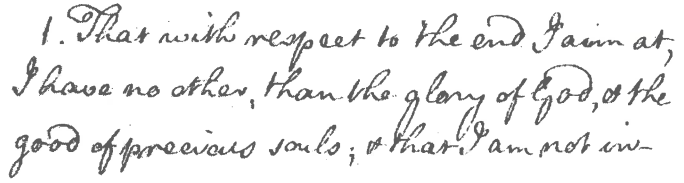
Luke 14:28

For which of you intending to build a tower, setteth not down first, and counteth the cost...

The Christian profession is set forth to us in scripture under the emblems, of **a race, a warfare, a wrestling, a journey**, all of which plainly teach us that idleness, security and indulgence, are so many contradictions to the very name we have assumed. Therefore the very first lesson in Christ's school is self-denial, without which, considering our inward corruptions, and outward impediments, we can make no progress beyond a few faint and ineffectual essays towards our design: nor indeed can we be reasonably satisfied of our sincerity, till we are brought to this, to be ready to resign all, that we may receive all. Our Lord therefore gives timely warning to his disciples not to expect great things for themselves, but rather to reckon upon it that the moment they enlist under his banner, they will meet opposition on all sides, and must win every inch of their way to his kingdom, by dint of conflict.

If this is the case in general, it is more peculiarly so with his ministers who by their office are engaged to stand in the forefront of the battle. The post they have to maintain is the most difficult, and of the most importance, and as upon their good or ill conduct much of the success of the day (humanly speaking) depends, the enemy will be sure to make the greatest head against them. The world, the flesh and the devil will be continually cutting them out new work, sometimes attempting to oppress them by violence, sometimes to supplant or entrap them by artifice. Perhaps too they will find a larger measure of trials than others even from the hand of the Lord whom they serve, to keep them humble, to make them watchful, to teach them to sympathize with the various griefs and complaints of their brethren, to illustrate the power and faithfulness of God, in preserving the bush unhurt in the midst of flames,[11] to enable them to comfort others with those consolations which the Lord administers to them in the hour of need. For these and other reasons they must not be surprised, if afflictions come down like the rain from heaven, if the stormy blasts of temptation shake their souls, and inbred corruptions like a raging flood threaten to bear down or to swallow up all before them. Happy for them that they are founded upon the Rock of Ages,[12] for they shall assuredly meet with such assaults as no other foundation could sustain.[13]

I desire therefore by the grace of God carefully to weigh these things beforehand that I may not hereafter be either discouraged or offended, when the sun waxes hot. Besides the general course of diligence, self-denial, and defiance to the world, which I am engaged to observe as a Christian, I shall find much to be done, much to be endured, much to be forborne, if I am ever called to the high office of a minister, with which I am yet unacquainted. I cannot pretend to enumerate particulars, till I have made a trial, neither is it necessary to my present purpose. The principal matter is to enquire how my heart stands to the prospect in the main. And I think if I know anything of myself, I am satisfied in the following points:



1. That with respect to **the end** I aim at, I have no other, than the glory of God, and the good of precious souls; and that I am not influenced by the view or hope of any worldly profit or worldly honour. I am the more assured of this from the nature of my present situation in life, since I cannot expect to take a single step in this way, without incurring a pretty general censure, and ridicule; nor to make any considerable progress, without resigning a settled maintenance for life, and casting myself wholly upon the care and faithfulness of my Master, not doubting but if he gives me work he will provide me maintenance.

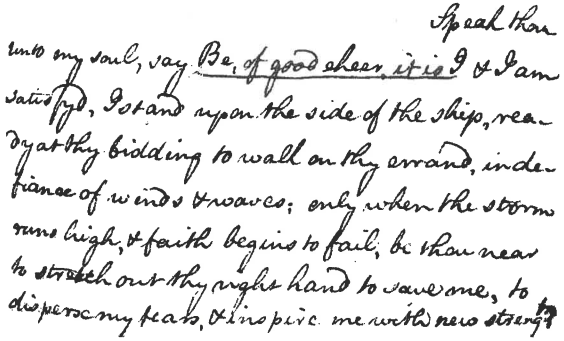
2. With regard to **the work** – I hope I am in some measure aware of its weight and importance and am willing to enter upon it accordingly, so as to make it the sole business of my life: to devote all my time, strength, talents and interest to the carrying it on; to allow myself in no engagement, converse, correspondence or study, which I cannot conscientiously pursue as subservient to this main point. For this I am willing to decline all concern with worldly business, any farther than as works of mercy may sometimes make it my duty, all precise researches into philosophical and classical learning (I do not mean, nor do I think it necessary to resolve never to look in a book of that sort; perhaps the little knowledge I have in these things may at times have its usefulness, and therefore I would not lose it, but I mean not to employ either time or thought on them but at intervals by ways of relaxation). Having a view of the pearl of great price, I am willing to part with all to receive it, and to take the Apostle's resolution to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified,[14] that I may declare his unsearchable riches to sinners.

"...to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified, that I may declare his unsearchable riches to sinners."

3 With regard to **the means**, I trust I have a real conviction of my own insufficiency, and that no considerations could in any case induce me to enter upon such an undertaking, but my reliance on the power and faithfulness of Jesus my Lord. He has often chosen weak things to confound the strong, and things that are not, to bring to naught things that are, and he can do it yet: nay he has done signally within my own time and observation. If this desire I have to serve him, is wrought in me by his Spirit, and if he shall be pleased to bring it to an issue, by showing me my call, and my work, I can leave it with him to do the rest. He has promised that as my day is so my strength shall be, whether it be a day of service, or a day of suffering: he has said *Lo I am with you always, till the end of the world*,[15] and especially where two or three are gathered together in his name, he has engaged to meet with them and bless them.[16] I cannot be in any place or circumstances, which these gracious words will not include, and surely as no one ever yet could complain they were spoken in vain, I shall not be left to be the first – No, thousands in every age have tried the word of the Lord and found it faithful, thousands are this minute resting the weight of their whole concerns upon it, and are borne up; and thousands yet unborn shall find to their consolation that the heavens and the earth shall pass away, before one jot or one tittle shall fail, of all that the Lord hath promised his people.[17]

So that upon the whole, though there are many difficulties and enemies apparent in the way, I see clearly that there are more with me than against me. All the praying

souls on earth, all the glorified saints in heaven, all the angels of God, nay God himself the Judge of all and Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, are on the side of every faithful messenger of the Gospel – Lord it is enough. I have to the best of my ability counted the cost and I find the odds are beyond all comparison: I accept the terms, all for all, Lord prevent me from holding back a part of the price, I would not make reserve of a single thought. Speak thou unto my soul, say *Be of good cheer, it is I*[18] and I am satisfied: I stand upon the side of the ship, ready at thy bidding to walk on thy errand, in defiance of winds and waves; only when the storm runs high, and faith begins to fail, be thou near to stretch out thy right hand to save me, to disperse my tears, and inspire me with new strength.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Thursday 29 June

Hebrews 5:4
And no man taketh this honour unto himself but he that is called of God as Aaron

Having considered briefly the nature and extent of the work of the ministry and the disposition of my own mind towards it, I propose now to enquire into **the nature, necessity and evidence of the ministerial call**, and the rather as I never remember to have met with anything either in reading or conversation, very express and full upon that subject. I shall not confine myself to a methodical scheme, but write down my thoughts as they occur, whether in a proper order or not. I shall begin with the following observations.

First
In the account the scripture gives of those who were called of God to important services there appears a great variety in the circumstances of their calls. As:

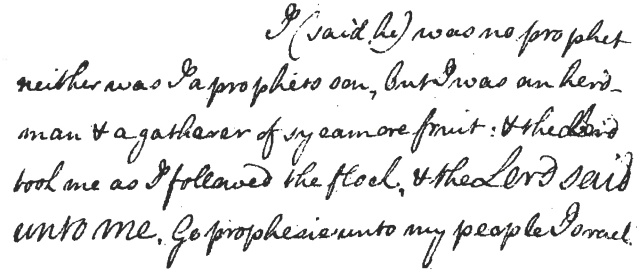
1. In the time:
   Samuel while yet a child, Moses when far advanced in life.

2. In the circumstances:
   Some have been gradually prepared for their mission, as Moses, Samuel, Elisha, John the Baptist; some have been picked out without any previous work, when they were thinking of nothing less - so Saul, Amos, Matthew; some have been insensibly wrought upon to offer themselves willingly as Isaiah; others have shown great reluctance and even flatly denied to go for a while as Moses and Jonah.

3. In the manner:
   Some by a voice from heaven, others by human messages, others by signs, others were led on step by step by the hand of Providence without anything recorded of a very extraordinary nature. Compare Exodus 3, Judges 11, 1 Samuel 10, Amos 7:14,15.

4. In the evidence:
   To some the very first call and appointment has been accompanied with a divine light, which has prevented the least degree of doubting and uncertainty; while others have stood in need of farther confirmation by external tokens. Compare Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1 with Judges 6:17.

5. In the persons:
   Some as I have already observed had been persons of piety and long attendanced upon the Lord before they assumed a public character - some were brought up carefully in the schools of the prophets, and seemed to have a kind of external qualification, but lest this should be deemed necessary, others were chosen from the lowest and most unlikely ranks of life. The case of Amos is sufficient for an illustration. *I* (said he) *was no prophet neither was I a prophet's son, but I was an herdman and a gatherer of sycamore fruit: and the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the* ***Lord said unto me****, Go prophecy unto my people Israel.*[19]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Nay farther (and it is carefully to be heeded that none may value themselves on the account of gifts) it has sometimes pleased the Lord to make use of wicked men to be the instruments of dispensing both his truths and his blessings to his people. Thus Saul was among the prophets for a season and Balaam was enlightened to deliver a most glorious prediction of the Redeemer and his kingdom. Our Lord has likewise told us that many at the last day will be able to plead (unhappy that this will be their only plea) that they have prophesied and cast out devils and done many wonderful works in his name. I observe:

Secondly

That whoever will engage with any hope of success in the office of a preacher or pastor to the people of God, must have a real call and appointment thereto. That it was so in the times of the Old and New Testament is clear from the history, and the Lord complaining of some, *I have not sent these prophets yet they ran, I have not spoken to them yet they prophesied*, adds soon after, *therefore they shall not profit this people at all*.[20] And that it is as necessary now as heretofore, appears plain from the consideration of the absolute necessity of the divine assistance through the whole course of the work, and that in two respects:

1. To enable a person to preach the Gospel with purity, free from essential errors, propriety according to the state and circumstance of the audience and with power so as to be able to enforce his message and to give evidence that it is indeed the word of God.

"to preach the Gospel with purity, ...propriety ...and power"

2. To convey the word with efficacy and life, to the hearts of the hearers, without which all gifts, all knowledge and all utterance will be vain and ineffectual, and the most evangelical, experimental and pathetic discourses will die away into empty air, for neither the tongues of men or angels, can enlighten the understanding, awaken the conscience, and rectify the will of sinners, unless the Lord himself give witness to the word of his grace, by manifesting the presence of his power to heal them.

And this I am afraid is one of the crying evils of our age and nation, and the source and occasion of many others; that so many thrust themselves into the priest's office who are neither appointed nor anointed by the Spirit of God. A carnal, unregenerate minister is a public judgment, so far as his sphere extends, and (as they say of comets) sheds a baneful influence[21] all around him: and even where there may be a principle of real grace, yet if such a one mistakes his station and rushes upon a work for which he is neither designed nor qualified, instead of being a burning and shining light to direct and animate others, he will hardly be able to maintain a feeble glimmering for his own use. I add:

Thirdly

It is highly desirable for a minister to have the proof and evidence of his call, made out to the full conviction of his own mind. With this, he will be able to force his way through all kinds of opposition; without it, or in proportion to the doubts and fears he has concerning it, every unexpected incident will distress and discourage him.

Yet though it is much to be wished and earnestly to be sought and prayed for, I do not apprehend it is essentially necessary to the very being of a divine call, that a person should be without any doubt or uncertainty at all. Indeed I do not at present recollect any scripture instance of this sort; the persons there recorded were mostly under the higher and more immediate kinds of inspiration; their services of a more public and extensive nature, and the hand of the Lord in their defence and establishment against their enemies, more evidently visible than is ordinarily necessary now – yet even some of these seem to have had intervals of questioning and unbelief. However, in the course of my acquaintance, I have met with those whom both I and all that have known them have been assured that their call was from on high, and to whom the Lord has borne testimony by making them very useful to many, and yet have not been able fully to satisfy themselves, for a considerable time after their going forth though at the same time, they durst not refrain. And this diffidence I have observed has been very useful to them, making them more eminent in humility, prayer and tenderness of spirit, than perhaps they would otherwise have been, and I doubt not but when these salutary ends have been answered the burden has been removed.

If the forgoing observations are true, I may infer for my own use: that though it is absolutely necessary in order to my having either comfort or success in the ministry, that I be especially called and led thereto by the Spirit of God, yet I have no reason to insist (though I may and do earnestly pray for it) that the distinct evidence and assurance should be made out to me immediately, or all at once; neither am I obliged to compare the motions of my own mind with the experience of others, so scrupulously as to be uneasy if I find a difference in some respects, since the Lord dealeth freely and will not be restrained, and I have seen that there is no small variety to be found among those who have been favoured with the plainest and most powerful proofs.

I shall proceed therefore to consider (according to my measure of light in an unbeaten subject) what are **the clearest and most satisfactory marks of a call from God to preach the Gospel**, or in other words wherein the difference between a minister and a private Christian does principally consist. I mean at or before his first setting out.

Supposing then a person to be possessed of some measure of the knowledge and experience of divine truth, and grace to order the main of his life and conversation agreeable thereto, without which he cannot be deemed a disciple of Christ himself, much less qualified to teach others, it seems necessary in the first place:

Nay farther (and it is carefully to be heeded that none may value themselves on the account of gifts) it has sometimes pleased the Lord to make use of wicked men to be the instruments of dispensing both his truths and his blessings to his people. Thus Saul was among the prophets for a season and Balaam was enlightened to deliver a most glorious prediction of the Redeemer and his kingdom. Our Lord has likewise told us that many at the last day will be able to plead (unhappy that this will be their only plea) that they have prophesied and cast out devils and done many wonderful works in his name. I observe:

Secondly

That whoever will engage with any hope of success in the office of a preacher or pastor to the people of God, must have a real call and appointment thereto. That it was so in the times of the Old and New Testament is clear from the history, and the Lord complaining of some, *I have not sent these prophets yet they ran, I have not spoken to them yet they prophesied*, adds soon after, *therefore they shall not profit this people at all*.[20] And that it is as necessary now as heretofore, appears plain from the consideration of the absolute necessity of the divine assistance through the whole course of the work, and that in two respects:

1. To enable a person to preach the Gospel with purity, free from essential errors, propriety according to the state and circumstance of the audience and with power so as to be able to enforce his message and to give evidence that it is indeed the word of God.

"to preach the Gospel with purity, ...propriety ...and power"

2. To convey the word with efficacy and life, to the hearts of the hearers, without which all gifts, all knowledge and all utterance will be vain and ineffectual, and the most evangelical, experimental and pathetic discourses will die away into empty air, for neither the tongues of men or angels, can enlighten the understanding, awaken the conscience, and rectify the will of sinners, unless the Lord himself give witness to the word of his grace, by manifesting the presence of his power to heal them.

And this I am afraid is one of the crying evils of our age and nation, and the source and occasion of many others; that so many thrust themselves into the priest's office who are neither appointed nor anointed by the Spirit of God. A carnal, unregenerate minister is a public judgment, so far as his sphere extends, and (as they say of comets) sheds a baneful influence[21] all around him: and even where there may be a principle of real grace, yet if such a one mistakes his station and rushes upon a work for which he is neither designed nor qualified, instead of being a burning and shining light to direct and animate others, he will hardly be able to maintain a feeble glimmering for his own use. I add:

Thirdly

It is highly desirable for a minister to have the proof and evidence of his call, made out to the full conviction of his own mind. With this, he will be able to force his way through all kinds of opposition; without it, or in proportion to the doubts and fears he has concerning it, every unexpected incident will distress and discourage him.

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If the forgoing observations are true, I may infer for my own use: that though it is absolutely necessary in order to my having either comfort or success in the ministry, that I be especially called and led thereto by the Spirit of God, yet I have no reason to insist (though I may and do earnestly pray for it) that the distinct evidence and assurance should be made out to me immediately, or all at once; neither am I obliged to compare the motions of my own mind with the experience of others, so scrupulously as to be uneasy if I find a difference in some respects, since the Lord dealeth freely and will not be restrained, and I have seen that there is no small variety to be found among those who have been favoured with the plainest and most powerful proofs.

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Supposing then a person to be possessed of some measure of the knowledge and experience of divine truth, and grace to order the main of his life and conversation agreeable thereto, without which he cannot be deemed a disciple of Christ himself, much less qualified to teach others, it seems necessary in the first place:

1. That he must have **a real desire to promote the glory of God and the salvation of souls**. Though this alone is not sufficient to prove his call, yet it must necessarily accompany it, if he has one. However furnished in other respects, if destitute of this, he will be like a clock without a weight, incapable of motion. Something of this indeed is the temper of everyone who has tasted that the Lord is gracious, but in a minister it must be peculiarly lively and pressing, so as to take place of every other design and concern in which he is engaged. Though perhaps he does not yet see it his duty to go forth, he has an habitual desire that it may prove so, and can say in the words of the Psalmist, *One thing have I desired of the Lord that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord*, to be employed in his peculiar work, *to behold the beauty of the Lord and to enquire in his temple.*[22] If it should be said unto him as to Esther, *What is thy petition and what is thy request?*[23] he has his answer ready: Lord if it please thee to make use of so worthless an instrument, my request is that I may be honoured to promote the savour of thy Gospel in the world. I have felt the power of it in my own soul, and I long to proclaim my experience of thy goodness to those around me. I live in the midst of thoughtless sinners who abuse the tenders of thy mercy, and throng the downward road by thousands, my heart yearns over them, my heart trembles for the ark of my God, and my heart's desire and prayer is that thou wouldst be pleased to send me forth in thy strength to plead thy cause, and to publish the glad tidings of salvation by redeeming blood.

"I have felt the power of it in my own soul, and I long to proclaim my experience of thy goodness to those around me."

2. I think there must farther be, **a serious sense of the greatness of the work, its dignity, difficulty**, etc, of which I have spoken something before. The want of this has caused so many (and some no doubt well-meaning) persons, to run unsent, and therefore unsuccessful. However desirous the person called of God may be to enter upon his office, he will still have very serious impressions of mind, when he considers, what the message is, whose it is, and that it will be the savour of life, or of death to all that shall hear it.[24] How shall I speak with that reverence which becomes an ambassador of God – with that earnestness which is suitable to the case of perishing souls – with that faithfulness as to deliver my own soul, and be pure from the blood of all men – with that wisdom as to avoid unnecessary offences, and not lay obstacles in my own way – with that steadiness, as not to be disconcerted by smiles or frowns, by temptations or afflictions, by men or devils? The servant of God will not be deterred by these considerations, because he knows the Lord whom he serves is able to deliver and support him, but it seems impossible he should be unaffected with them.

3. It seems plain enough in the general, that there must be **a measure of gifts bestowed suitable to the work**, if the call is really from above. But there are many questions and difficulties occur on this head which require a fuller discussion, than perhaps I am able to give.

It seems hard to determine in the first place, what may be the strict <u>modus</u> of a ministerial gift; what is the standard below which no person can be deemed duly fitted and furnished for this sacred office. For who shall limit the Lord in the choice of his instruments? Once we know he employed a dumb ass to rebuke the madness of a prophet. Heretofore he raised up eminent champions for the faith out of the schools and the best Christians and most able ministers have been among the most learned of the age: of late years he has carried on, and abundantly increased his work in this land, by very different hands, having sent the unlettered and ignorant, mean persons and despised to a proverb, who have undoubtedly in the main been enabled to give every proof a candid mind can ask, that their mission was from on high. I myself have heard persons preach whom I have thought not merely destitute of learning, but even of capacity, and to have so small a degree either of knowledge or expression, that I have judged it highly imprudent in them to attempt so much as a private exhortation; but when I have found that sinners have been converted, mourners comforted and holiness promoted, by what I thought so indifferent, I have seen reason to turn my censure upon myself, and charge it to my own pride, unbelief and prejudice that I was not edified likewise. On the other hand the fairest show of gifts considered absolutely are no proof at all of a minister of Christ. For there has seldom been an author of any dangerous error, or eminent opposer of Gospel truth either in principle or practice, but he has been (if a leader) a man of considerable parts and abilities. Gifts may perhaps be compared to a weapon or sword which will enable a man to do much execution in the battle, but they are no evident proofs on which side he intends to fight; and many a weak hearer, has mistaken the "enticing words" the Apostle so earnestly warns us of (Colossians 2:4[25]), for the immediate gift and teaching of the Spirit of God. It seems not easy to judge in this matter but by the effects, which is not practicable in my own case and before I set out; and yet if I wander I am liable to 2 dangers: either, unadvisedly to break the rank in life, in which Providence has placed me, and from an overweening opinion of my own qualifications, to set up for a teacher of others, when I have more need to be taught myself; or else, by seeking for too much in myself, and looking too little to the Lord, give way to needless doubts and fears, and neglect to stir up the gift

"Gifts may perhaps be compared to a weapon or sword ...but they are no evident proofs on which side he intends to fight."

that is in me through distrust. I have often found in times past that what I have persuaded myself was confidence in the Lord, has proved no better than presumption; and on the other hand what I called caution and prudence, have at length appeared mere cowardice and unbelief; and I have reason to suspect myself still. Lord do thou lead and guide me in the path of judgment for thy name's sake.

Another thing not easy to fix, is the time when the possession of these gifts may be expected. I can easily believe that if the Lord should give me a lawful opportunity of speaking to a thousand people, he would enable me to acquit myself agreeably to his will and intention, because he has promised that as my day is, my strength shall be; but if I think by any essays I can make now in private or to a few friends, I may form a judgment how I shall perform then, it seems to be tempting the Lord, and would probably distress and entangle my mind, because I conceive I have no promise in this case to go on, for it is nowhere said, we may expect to possess strength today, suitable to the work and trial of tomorrow. It was not till after Saul was anointed king that God gave him another heart, and in many places the call to the office seems to have been previous to the power necessary to execute it. See Numbers 11:24.[26]

The proper means of strengthening and increasing a measure of gifts already received is another query upon this subject, which I am not resolved in. Admitting after the best enquiry I can make, I still incline to think that I have a warrant to go on, and yet am dubious whether I have the necessary gifts at present, though I hope to attain them in time, whether it is better for me to wait in private upon the Lord, by prayer, meditation, etc, or rather to begin gradually and expect the increase of my talents, in the faithful improvement of those I already have. The apostles and disciples were commanded long after their calling to tarry at Jerusalem till they should be endued with power from on high[27]: there was a degree of grace necessary to carry them through what lay before them, which they had not yet attained; had they gone forth without it they had sunk in the attempt. On the contrary Apollos in an honest zeal, making the best use of the light he had received, was thereby brought the sooner, to understand the way of God more perfectly[28]. Here too is a double danger: of stepping out of the way of Providence, and acting from my own spirit by being too hasty; or, of losing opportunities, and preventing both my usefulness and improvement, by being too slow.

"...a double danger: of stepping out of the way of Providence... by being too hasty; or, of losing opportunities ...by being too slow."

More difficulties might be stated in this matter, but I have already gone beyond my line; I think these are the principal – for myself I purpose to wait the Lord's time

and way for satisfaction. He can disperse doubts, and make everything plain and clear in a moment and he only.

4 It seems farther necessary amongst us, while even the real worshippers of God, are so unhappily divided both with respect to discipline or doctrine, that **whoever has a call from God should likewise have a direction from him** too, under what form or denomination he shall appear, since some choice must be made, and it seems too great a point to decide by one's private spirit. I speak chiefly of such as myself who have not been previously connected or engaged on any side, but have seen that the Lord has been pleased to own and prosper his work in a variety of ways. For my part I doubt not but some are nearer the primitive churches, and better suited for edification (to appearance) than others: yet I am almost persuaded that if some ministers now living were to quit the church in which the Lord employs them, even for one more agreeable to the Gospel rule, it would lessen their usefulness, and upon the whole be a wrong step. When I consider the various tempers, talents and sentiments both of ministers and people, I make no doubt but the Lord, the great Captain who assigns every man his post, adapts the one to the other with a propriety truly admirable. As every good gift is from above, and no man has possession of all truth, I suppose each minister has such a portion of it assigned to him, as is suited to the part they are appointed to act, and perhaps according as circumstances vary with them, their judgment and conduct are insensibly altered. Perhaps the Lord sees fit to conceal some important doctrine (as we judge) from a man who appears evidently taught from above in other respects; and we are often offended, but we should rather admire if we knew the cause. It is possible there may be something in his temper or circumstance which we cannot see into makes this necessary, or it may be in consideration of the weakness and prejudice of multitudes of his hearers – they would not receive, cannot bear a more enlightened preacher, neither could he dissemble his sentiments to accommodate himself to them. What then must be done? Shall they be left to themselves, to go on in their obstinacy and die in their sins, because they oppose a scriptural truth? So man perhaps would judge and determine, but the Lord is God and not man: he can bear with us, better than we can with one another;[29] therefore for the edification of this people, and the conviction of all who would confine the temple of the Lord to their own side, he sends them teachers who in these offensive matters are in the same sentiments with themselves, and can honestly preach the essential truths of the Gospel in their own way. I make no doubt but that Luther and Calvin were more useful as they were, than if each had possessed the other's sentiments, or even than if they had both been what we call Calvinists – each had his particular employment marked out, and his qualifications were adapted accordingly.

Though there may be several other associated marks of a real call (for I cannot pretend to manage this subject in all its extent) I think the concurrence of these may be sufficient to determine the point, and I believe it necessary that they do all in some degree concur

to prove it, to a man's self. The proof to others is something different, and arises from a compounded consideration of the doctrine delivered, the life and conversation of the preacher, and the effect with which his labours are attended, though in each of these points, much caution is to be used, as it is possible to mistake on each side; but this is not my present business.

To apply the whole to my own case: I conclude there are certain qualifications, without which it would be rashness in me to think of quitting the peaceful port in which I have found repose these three years past, and to venture to thrust myself into the ocean as it were, upon so difficult and perilous a voyage; some of these in a low degree I think (by the grace and goodness of God) I experience within myself. Other qualifications I am at present uncertain about, not having a clear notion of them, consequently cannot be assured that I possess them. Yet upon the closest enquiry I do not find anything to make me conclude that this warm desire of my heart must be a delusion. I think rather it must be God alone who could make me willing, and he when he pleases can make me able. Therefore I resolve (in his strength) to go on waiting and praying for direction and (if it be his will) for success. Thus much I hope at least, that he will graciously accept the desire, though he should not see fit to bring it to an issue: according to that condescending word: *Whereas it was in thy heart to build an house unto my name, Thou didst well that it was in thine heart.*[30] O Lord I am thy servant; as such I have given myself unto thee a thousand times, and I now once more confirm the surrender. O Lord I desire to serve thee, not in a way of my own contrivance, but in whatever way thou shalt appoint. O suffer me not to deceive myself; if I am in this influenced by any wrong and selfish views, reveal them to me and teach me to abhor and renounce them. Lord, methinks I would not move but to thy glory, I would not speak but to thy praise: may I not appeal to thy heart-searching eye that I love thee? Yes, it is thy own work, I cannot question but thou hast enabled me to love thee! I who was an apostate, a seducer, a busy emissary for the devil, have received grace to love the Lord whom I long blasphemed and defied;[31] many of thy children have known the surprising change and praised thee on my behalf.[32] Will it please thee O Lord to give them matter for farther praise? Shall they say of me, He preaches that faith which once he destroyed?[33] This would make their song complete: this would be the highest triumph of thy grace and power. Lord thy will be done, I am thine, use me as thou wilt, only be thou my guide, my shield, my sun, my joy and portion here and for ever.

"I resolve (in his strength) to go on waiting and praying for direction."

Lord, methinks I would not move but to thy glory

Monday 3 July

1 Timothy 4:16

Take heed unto thyself and unto thy doctrine.

This is an important and extensive precept; it reaches to every person, and every circumstance, and should be especially remembered by everyone who like Timothy is or intends to be a minister of the Gospel. It is easily remembered, vastly comprehensive, and may be applied every hour and minute of the day. O that it were always upon my thoughts.

There is in man a strange proness to separate those things which the wisdom and word of God have inseparably joined. Some acknowledge the necessity of taking heed to themselves, but avow a mere indifferency about doctrines. Others are so loud, zealous and busy in defence of their favourite tenets and doctrines, that they seem to think themselves worthy of no care at all.

Thus we labour, but not for ourselves.[34]

The connection and opposition between the two parts of the sentence afford several useful hints, which I shall touch, in general, and then consider the two branches of the advice more particularly.

Take heed of thyself and thy doctrine, that is:

1. *Take heed of thyself,* <u>and then</u> *take heed of thy doctrine;* for otherwise it will not much signify what thou preachest, unless thy life and conversation show thee in earnest. A bad example will be more followed than the best precepts. Nay, the purer thy doctrine, so much the more mischief thou wilt do if thy life be unsavoury, for thereby thou wilt bring a reproach upon the truth itself.

2. *Take heed to thyself* <u>in order to</u> the *taking heed to thy doctrine.* The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and with none other. As a preacher thou standest in continual need of renewed communications from the Holy Spirit. But will the Spirit of God, the Spirit of holiness, reside in thee and manifest himself unto thee, unless thou continuest instant, in watchfulness, prayer and self-denial? Surely no – if not, what will become of thy doctrine? How soon, how necessarily, wilt thou depart from the

"...it will not much signify what thou preachest, unless thy life and conversation show thee in earnest."

truth? Or if thou art confined within a form of sound words, how dull, heartless and useless must thy labour prove? Lord impress these weighty lessons upon my mind, so necessary for a minister, so necessary for a private Christian, for it signifies as little what we hold as what we preach unless our lives are influenced by it.

3. *Take heed to thyself.* If thou hast set up for a teacher of others, teach thyself also; thou art become a public person, and hast the eyes of many upon thee, some maliciously waiting for thy falling, some ignorantly setting thee before them as their pattern, and perhaps ready to give into any indiscretion that shall come recommended to them by thy practice. Take heed to thyself, lest thou stumble the weak, grieve the strong, and cause the ungodly to triumph.

4. *Take heed to thyself*, **for there the principal danger lies**. The world and the devil will undoubtedly spread all their snares, and join all their force against thee, but thy principal danger lies at home. As nothing from without entering into a man defileth him, so it may be said that nothing from without that befalleth a man can either hurt or hinder him in his spiritual progress unless he himself become one of the party. Thou that art devoted to God, take heed of thyself. Wretched self will draw thee from thy allegiance, and fill thee with shame and sorrow unless thou beware.

5. *Take heed to thy doctrine*, lest thou poison the people under the pretence of feeding them: lest thou make sad the hearts of those whom thou oughtest to comfort, and strengthen the wicked in their wickedness. If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch, but wo to the leader. It is an awful thing to be accountable not only for thyself but for others, for a whole congregation, or a whole parish; yet what skill, what diligence, what faithfulness does it require, to maintain the testimony of a good conscience in this matter!

6. *Take heed to thy doctrine*, lest it contradict thy practice, and so thou be condemned out of thy own mouth. As a preacher it is the business of thy life to illustrate the actions and tempers of the Lord Jesus; but if thou thyself art not a pattern of that meekness, humility, heavenly-mindedness, and zeal, which thou enforcest by his commands and recommendest from his example, how inexcusable and absurd must thy conduct appear; the more spiritual thy doctrine, and the more earnest and more frequent thou art in delivering it, so much the more expressly wilt thou incur the censure of those who know their Master's will and do it not.

But I would more particularly consider the import of these advices, as they may be applied to myself, if the Lord sees fit, to accomplish my desire. It will then especially behove me first to be careful of my personal conduct, secondly of my public work. Every Christian is bound to adorn the Gospel in all his behaviour, but a minister is

more strongly obliged; every Christian has need to watch unto prayer, but a minister most of all. Every Christian is to let his light shine in the world, but the minister is appointed for this very end. Every Christian is bound to cultivate every grace, but some seem peculiarly necessary and beautiful in a minister – on these (as they occur) I would spend a few thoughts.

1. Humility. *Learn of me* says our Lord *for I am meek and lowly in heart*[35] *– if anyone among you will be great let him become the servant of all.*[36] This is a foundation grace - without it, no comfort or success can be expected, for *God resisteth the proud, but giveth his grace to the humble*[37]. He sets himself in battle array against the one, but prevents the wishes of the other with the abundant communications of his love and grace. A proud minister is surely a contradiction; will the Lord employ an instrument that sets himself up?

[Newton left off here and continued this point later on page 24]

Friday 4 August 1758

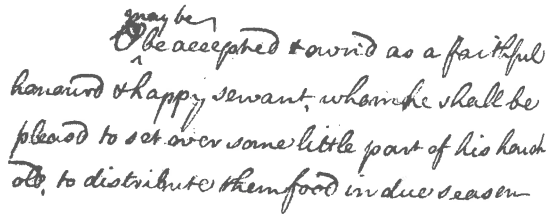
[John Newton's birthday]

A variety of causes, of which I must confess the inconstancy of my own mood is not the least, have prevented me carrying on my meditations in writing as I had proposed; yet though I have not written, my thoughts and my prayers have been generally pretty much upon the point, for which I set apart the six preceding weeks; I have in this interval written to several of my dear friends in the ministry requesting their advice and prayers and especially that they would join me in my addresses to a throne of grace on this day. I have only heard from one of them, Mr Brewer, who far beyond my expectation has made a proposal to me of a place and people, which carries in it something of the appearance of a call, and seems to be very extraordinary. I would humbly look on it as an encouragement to proceed and that the Lord is not displeased with my poor desires to serve him since he has permitted his servant who I believe is usually very cautious in these matters, to make so sudden an advance. I have wrote him a general answer giving an account of my sentiments with respect both to doctrine and discipline professing my readiness to follow the steps of divine Providence anywhere, without condition and without reserve. I have met some farther encouragement in a society I was lately enabled to set up, of young persons for religious conference. We have had three meetings and I have found much enlargement and comfort in speaking to and with them, particularly last night, when though I had nothing considerable prepared for the purpose, I found a pleasing liberty and enlargement both in thought and expression. I desire to praise the Lord for all these tokens of his presence, and to cast

"...that when I stand in need of more light, more power, more steadiness and freedom, he will ... stand by, support, furnish and succeed me."

myself upon his promise for what is to come: that when I stand in need of more light, more power, more steadiness and freedom, he will (if after all my prayers for direction he brings me into such circumstances) stand by, support, furnish and succeed me.

The day is now arrived when I proposed to close all my deliberations on this subject, with a solemn unreserved, unconditional surrender of my whole self to the Lord. I am now entering upon a new year of life, I now (having met with nothing to deter me in the time I have taken to consider of it) enter upon and give myself up to a new view of life. From this day I only wait for light and direction when and where to move and to begin; and for this I pray that I may be enabled to wait patiently till I clearly see the Lord going before me and making me a plain path, but in my own mind I already consider myself as torn off from the world and worldly concerns, and devoted and appointed for sanctuary service. I have been reading what I have already written in this book concerning the variety, the weight, the importance, and honour of the sacred office of a minister; I have essayed to impress my mind as much as possible with these things, and though alas my heart is far from affected with them proportionably to their import, yet I trust I feel something of them, and of my own insufficiency. I divide my time this day between reading, writing and prayer. I have already been pouring out my soul before the Lord and have found some freedom in giving myself up to him. The deed is past, this forenoon, though I purpose to confirm it again and again before night. Jesus has long been my Lord, now I take him more especially and intimately as my Master. O may I be accepted and owned as a faithful, honoured and happy servant, whom he shall be pleased to set over some little part of his household, to distribute them food in due season.[38] My present surrender is absolute and unlimited, but I shall instance in a few particulars:


may be
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& to distribute them food in due season

1. **I resolve by the grace of God** from this day forward, until the Lord shall be pleased to appoint me a sphere of action, as well as afterwards, that the whole of my conversation, reading, etc, shall as far as possible be spiritual and scriptural; and that knowing my own weakness that I am for the most part tongue-tied, at

least restrained from speaking good, when in company with vain and worldly people, I will endeavour to avoid all conversation where I cannot expect I shall find or make an opportunity of saying something suitable to my new character; and endeavour to redeem my time to the purposes of prayer, reading and meditation, that I may be more furnished for my great work.

2. **I resolve by the grace of God**, to aim and to pray for a composed, reverent frame of outward carriage, carefully to watch against levity, and whatever seems either to indicate, or to occasion an unguarded frame of spirit. I see something very desirable in that seriousness the scripture so often recommends, and I am sure it is peculiarly necessary as well as beautiful in a minister, and the want of it has often disgusted me in some good and eminent men. I have just been reading that Mr Philip Henry, had something so striking and exemplary of this kind, as acquired him the epithet of "Heavenly"[39], even from the common people. This was a title of honour indeed. O for such a holiness of heart as might shine through and sanctify every action of my life. I mean not that I think either sourness or gloominess become a preacher better than others. True gravity is far from these, and is a temperament of behaviour arising from a fixed persuasion of the presence of God, the value of souls, the shortness of time, the influence of example, the love of mankind and the vastness and reality of eternal things, all impressed upon the mind together. I desire particularly to be upon my guard to restrain sallies of wit, to which I have some propensity, and have at times succeeded in gaining the applause of my company, but seldom without incurring my own censure. It is a dangerous talent, which needs much grace to restrain, and much judgment to manage. I pray I may be always very cautious of the season, the subject and the company, whenever I attempt to say anything of that sort.

"O for such a holiness of heart as might shine through and sanctify every action of my life."

3. **I resolve by the grace of God**, to strive and to pray for a spirit of moderation in all things, that I may not be at any time brought under the power of lawful things; but may practice self-denial in whatever point, or whatever degree, scripture, conscience and experience shall tell me is necessary to keep my mind and my body ready and disposed for service. In my private life I have often been ensnared and hurt for want of a command and mastery over my inclinations – sometimes too much indulgence in a meal either with regard to the kind or the quantity of my food has hindered me greatly; but it is now of much more importance to keep my body always cool and easy that it may not encumber my spirit, seeing I shall have more immediate and continual need to be always praying

and waiting upon God for strength and instruction. Heretofore when I was wise and prudent in these respects, or on the contrary failed, and acted wrong, the advantage or inconvenience chiefly affected myself, but now I am becoming a public person if by a careless, indulgent behaviour I now should grieve the Spirit of God, and cause him at any time to withdraw, it will affect not only my comfort but my usefulness, and those who seek a blessing from my mouth, will be disappointed through my means. I know indeed when I have done my best I shall still fall short; and that Satan does sometimes gain advantages against the most wary; and I know that the Lord is exceedingly gracious and does not deal with such poor frail creatures as they in strictness deserve, and I know that the Gospel is a Gospel of liberty and that I am called to serve in the spirit of a child, and that when through infirmity I sin, I have an all-prevailing Advocate with the Father, but these considerations are not intended to make me less circumspect but more so. God forbid that I should use my liberty as a cloak, or presume to sin because grace has abounded, or think there is such a thing as being too conformable to Christ Jesus my Head and Master; or that I have less need than the Apostle had to mortify and keep under my body, to subdue and withstand my appetite. Lord help me, thou knowest my weakness in this: how often I have resolved, and to how little purpose.

4. **I resolve by the grace of God**, when he shall give me call and opportunity to speak for him in public, that I will honestly and plainly declare the truths of the Gospel so far as I shall be favoured with knowledge and experience in them. It is my prayer that I may not be permitted to keep back any part of the counsel of God. Yet I resolve and would endeavour always to bear in mind the scriptural distinction of babes and men, milk and strong meat,[40] and remember the practice of my dear Lord and Master who taught his disciples as they were able to bear.[41] There is a Christian wisdom highly needful to direct in this matter, for which I hope to pray constantly. For I believe the different circumstances of hearers, make it necessary for a wise and skilful preacher to adapt a variety of manner in his addresses. Some persons are to be caught as it were by guile, some points (occasionally) to be implied rather than enforced (yet so as what I began with be not interrupted). I pray that I never temporize, or preach so as to leave a candid and judicious hearer at a loss as to what my real sentiments are. I would resolve to express plain propositions in plain words,[42] and if I think it expedient (at a particular time) to omit a doctrine, either on account of the state of the audience, or with regard to my own plan of discourse as it is impossible to speak of everything on every occasion; I will be cautious not to give reason for putting a wrong construction on my silence.

5. **I resolve by the grace of God** at least till I have any reason for altering my plan, to insist more fully and immediately upon three great branches of divine truth:

1. **The doctrine of Jesus Christ crucified.** I believe to insist much upon the great essential points of the glories of his person and offices, his wonderful love and condescension, his power, faithfulness and readiness to save, the grandeur of his works, the perfection of his example, his life, passion, death and resurrection. I say thus to enlarge much on the names, properties, etc, of our dear Redeemer, as it is undoubtedly the most pleasant set of topics, so the most useful and effectual, to rouse a hatred against sin, to feed the springs of grace into the heart, to animate and to furnish every believer for his spiritual warfare. Yet I think a discourse of this kind should seldom be concluded without a solemn expostulation to sinners – of the danger of neglecting this great salvation, and to saints – to show their love to the Lord by hating and renouncing everything that is evil.

"three great branches of divine truth:
- Jesus Christ crucified
- love
- Gospel holiness"

2. **The great doctrine of love**, which is the life and soul of the Gospel; and which seems too much to be left unnoticed amidst the general strife there is for and against other doctrines – If the Lord please I would make it the business of my life to state, illustrate and recommend this divine essential principle, publicly and from house to house – especially by my example: by being gentle, forbearing, forgiving and affectionate to all, and aiming all my actions to promote the glory of him, who loved me and gave himself for me.

3. **The doctrine, or rather, the practice of Gospel holiness** – to set forth as I shall be enabled, the glorious character and privilege of walking with God, and maintaining a conversation in heaven, in the midst of an ensnaring, troublesome world.

I would not undervalue or omit any scriptural truth, but these three I would especially regard and enforce. There is a diversity of gifts from the same Spirit. Some ministers are more eminently useful in controversies, rescuing the truth from the attack of opposers; some are peculiarly fitted for awakening dead sinners, some for comforting mourners, etc. For my own part so far as it is lawful for me to choose, I could wish to be out of the noise of strife and notice, with beloved Mary to sit at the feet of Jesus,[43] and with the beloved disciple to declare to others that which I myself have seen and heard and tasted of the Word of Life,[44] and to preach my measure of the Gospel grace with as much indifference to names and parties, as though I was in a distant country where no-one had ever heard of the name of Jesus the Saviour but myself.[45]

And here I shall conclude for the present; it is drawing near five in the evening and I have been waiting upon the Lord in retirement with fasting and prayer since six in the morning. When I go from hence I shall take my refreshment with a thankful heart humbly trusting that the Lord has accepted my desire and that in his good time he will both appoint me work, and furnish me with grace, wisdom and strength to perform it.[46] I cannot boast of any particular manifestations in this day's attendance; but I think my heart has in the general bent set to seek the face of my God, and that I now find my spirit submissive to his will. My desire to serve him still continues, and I am enabled to cast everything else upon him. What remains but that I shut up and confirm all with unfeigned praises for all his mercies.

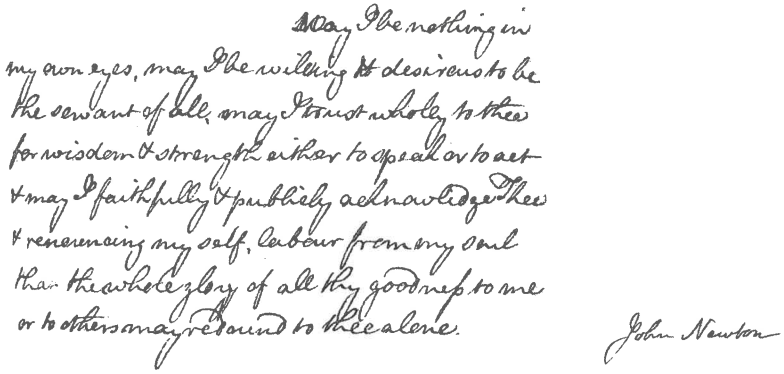
Bless the Lord O my soul and forget not all his benefits.[47] O Lord thou hast done great things for me. I was a rebel, an apostate, a vile Syrian ready to perish but thou didst pass by me when I was lying in my filth and my blood and didst bid me live.[48] Thou spakest a returning word when I was upon the very brink of destruction: when I thought I had not many minutes to live, and yet durst not think of dying, thou heardest my half-formed prayer, thou sentest thy word and drew me out of the deep waters[49] – and O how innumerable have been the deliverances, how inexpressible the mercies, how continual the care and love I have experienced from thee since.[50] Thou hast brought me O Lord, vile, sinful, unprofitable creature as I am, to see this day. Thou hast crowned another year with thy goodness. Thou hast favoured me with an opportunity of yielding myself to be thine, in a manner I never before did, and till lately could not have thought of, nor durst have attempted. Now Lord be graciously pleased to hear and accept and ratify from thy glorious throne the poor imperfect determinations of my heart. Grant that what has been sown in weakness may be raised in power[51]; that what has been transacted before thee in secret may in thy good time be brought publicly to light by the effects. Remember O Lord my prayers and the prayers of those thy servants whom thou hast stirred up to take part in my concerns. O may this be a day much to be remembered unto the Lord hereafter by me and by many. O Lord bring my whole body, soul and spirit into an entire subject to thy law and will, empty me of pride, self and vanity, fill me with the gifts and graces of thy Spirit: yea Lord fill me with thyself, dwell in me and abide with me for ever; give me to feel in myself, and to declare unto others, the blessedness of the man whom thou choosest and causest to approach unto thee.

"Grant that what has been sown in weakness may be raised in power."

Amen & Amen.

[Newton then continued from where he left off on page 19]

I would now resume the subject I broke off, where I was proposing to think over, those graces and qualifications which are more eminently requisite and beautiful in a minister. I had mentioned humility as the first – the soil of every good seed, without which we can neither wait upon God with profit, nor worship him with acceptance. He giveth his grace to the humble; but the proud he beholdeth afar off,[52] he rejecteth their prayers, he abhorreth their persons, he resisteth all their endeavours. Alas should the Lord only leave me to myself how miserable must I be? How soon should I fall from one iniquity to another: what then must be the case with those whom he resists, and sets himself (as the word is) in battle array against them. How ought I to guard against the remotest approaches to so dangerous and destructive temper, which like a fatal blast would nip the fairest prospects of usefulness in the very bud. But can I then reason myself out of that pride which I find interwoven or as it were ingrained in my very nature? Can I bring myself to a lowly temper by dint of argument? Surely no. I have long found my heart intractable to these methods. What can I do but carry it by faith and prayer to the Great Physician who can (and he only) cleanse, and soften and empty, etc; and then new mould it according to the form of his divine Gospel, animate it with his love, and fill it with his own Spirit. Lord I came to learn from thee as thou hadst bid me, this lesson which is taught in no school but thine. Thou wert meek and lowly, O let this mind be also in me. **Give me a humbling sense of my sins, give me a humbling view of thy glory, give me a humbling taste of thy love, for surely nothing humbles like these.** All my pride springs from ignorance. Grant me to know myself, to know thee, to know my relation to thee, and my dependence upon thee, my unprofitableness and insufficiency before thee; and the extent and importance of the mercies I continually receive from thee. And particularly O Lord I pray for this grace with regard to the service unto which thou art about to call me. May I be nothing in my own eyes, may I be willing and desirous to be the servant of all, may I trust wholly to thee for wisdom and strength either to speak or to act and may I faithfully and publicly acknowledge thee and renouncing myself, labour from my soul that the whole glory of all thy goodness to me or to others may redound to thee alone.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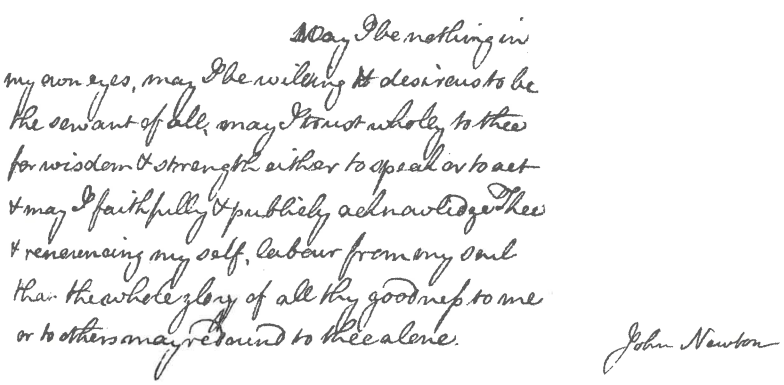
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John Newton

End Notes

[1] Newton referred to his 33rd birthday as the entrance into the 34th year of his life.

[2] The marks of acceptance were not at first easily discerned – for Newton's first attempt at preaching left him so tongue-tied that he stepped down from the pulpit, begging the regular preacher to take over. On his second attempt he read "like a dolt" from his notes. His initial applications to be licensed as a minister of the established church (Anglican) were turned down. It was a further six or seven years after this journal was written, before Newton finally made it into the ministry full time. Perhaps the delay over those years was indeed an answer to his prayer here, in order to "prevent me taking any hasty or disorderly steps, that may bring a reproach upon my profession or involve me in needless difficulties."

[3] A later illustration of this circumspection which he prayed for: in 1780, Newton declined a request to take part in a protest march in London, which was infiltrated and led to the violent "Gordon riots". His colleagues, who had tried to persuade him to join them, were very nearly incarcerated in the Tower of London.

[4] "always living upon the expense": in this context, always giving out something of himself to others

[5] During his lifetime, Newton's writings were published in America (sometimes within a year of being published in Britain), translated into Dutch, French, German, etc. He played a major role in sending overseas and supporting pioneer missionaries such as Richard Johnson to Australia, William Carey, Henry Martyn and Claudius Buchanan to India, and indeed in the formation and encouragement of several missionary societies across denominations – the Baptist Missionary Society, the Church Missionary Society, the Moravian Missions, etc. Today his hymn *Amazing Grace* carries "the knowledge and savour of the Gospel" into many "distant places".

[6] Jeremiah 18:6; Isaiah 64:8

[7] Isaiah 55:13

[8] Mark 5:1-20. See also Newton's *Olney Hymns*, 1779: Book 1, Hymn 92, *The legion dispossessed.*

Legion was my name by nature,
Satan raged within my breast;
Never misery was greater,
Never sinner more possessed:
Mischievous to all around me,
To myself the greatest foe;
Thus I was, when Jesus found me,
Filled with madness, sin and woe…

"Love," he said, "will sweeten labours,
Thou hast something yet to do;
Go and tell your friends and neighbours,
What my love has done for you:
Live to manifest my glory,
Wait for heaven a little space;
Sinners, when they hear thy story,
Will repent and seek my face."

[9] Canon Dr Modupe Taylor-Pearce of Freetown, who is on the JNP Board of Reference, endorses Newton's point when he says: "For us living through the pain and cruelty of the civil war in Sierra Leone, and possessed with the eternal Gospel that can turn people from 'darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God' every help to show that man can change with concrete examples is extremely welcome."

[10] The answer to this prayer is confirmed in the second-to-last entry in Newton's diary:

"Saturday 4 August 1804. Though I cannot write, I long to pray and praise. I have much cause for both. O my gracious Lord supported by thee, I this day enter my eightieth year. My health by thy mercy is good, but my spirits are very weak. Yet thou still enablest me to speak from the pulpit, and I am still heard with attention. I hope some may be benefited by my lispings. Thy power is often magnified in the weakness of the instrument."

[11] The text Newton chose for William Cowper's funeral sermon was Exodus 3:2-3: And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. "I know of no text in the whole book of God's Word" he said, "more suited to the case of my dear friend than that I have read. He was indeed a bush in flames for twenty-seven years but he was not consumed. And why? Because the Lord was there."

[12] Alluding to 1 Corinthians 10:4. The first appearance of the famous hymn of the same title, "Rock of Ages", by Augustus Toplady, was in the Gospel Magazine - a periodical founded by Thomas Haweis as a result of enthusiastic and detailed suggestions from John Newton during this formative period in Liverpool while he was searching to know God's will for his life.

[13] Newton later echoed this comparison in *Olney Hymns*, Book 2, Hymn 88, *The flood*:

One sin can raise, though small it seems,
A flood to drown the soul;
What then, when countless million streams
Shall join, to swell the whole…

Oh! then on JESUS ground your hope,
That stone in Zion laid;
Lest your poor building quickly drop,
With ruin, on your head.

[14] 1 Corinthians 2:2

[15] Matthew 28:20

[16] Matthew 18:20

[17] Matthew 5:18

[18] Matthew 14:27

[19] Amos 7:14,15

[20] Jeremiah 23:21, 32

[21] Quoting from a translation of *Jerusalem delivered*, by Torquato Tasso, 1580:

Each gentle star had quenched its kindly beam:
From sullen skies malignant planets gleam;
Their baneful influence on the earth they shed,
And wide through air infectious vapours spread.

[22] Psalm 27:4

[23] Esther 5:3

[24] 2 Corinthians 2:16

[25] The English Standard Version translates this as "plausible words" in Colossians 2:4.

[26] verse 25 is better

[27] Luke 24:49

[28] Acts 18:24-26

[29] Newton made this point in *Olney Hymns*, 1779, Book 1, Hymn 53, *One there is, above all others, well deserves the name of Friend*:

Could we bear from one another,
What he daily bears from us?
Yet this glorious Friend and Brother,
Loves us though we treat him thus:
Though for good we render ill,
He accounts us brethren still.

[30] 1 Kings 8:18. When William Wilberforce's bill to abolish the slave trade was thrown out of the House of Commons yet again, Newton drew on this verse to console him: "David purposed to build the Temple. This service was designed for his son Solomon, but the Lord accepted David's intention, and was pleased to say, Thou didst well that it was in thine heart… God accepts people, not according to what they have actually done in his service, but according to what they would have done, had they been able…Your efforts in favour of the poor Africans have again been counteracted. But it was well it was in your heart to relieve them from oppression". It was the very point he had made over twenty years earlier in his sermon notes accompanying *Amazing Grace*, that the Lord "graciously accepted David's intention, for he not only notices the poor services of his people, but even their desires to serve him, when they spring from a principle of simple love, though opportunity should be wanting".

[31] Newton recalled to mind every day this illustration of God's grace to him, even including it in his own epitaph:
"JOHN NEWTON, CLERK,
Once an Infidel and Libertine,
A servant of slaves in Africa,
Was, by the rich mercy of our Lord and Saviour
JESUS CHRIST,
Preserved, restored, pardoned,
And appointed to preach the Faith
He had long laboured to destroy…"

[32] Here is another reflection which later found expression in one of Newton's hymns:
Thy wondering saints rejoice to see
A wretch, like me, restored
And point, and say, "How changed is he,
Who once defied the LORD!"
Olney Hymns, 1779, Book 3, Hymn 60

[33] Acts 9:21

[34] From Virgil's *Complaint*

[35] Matthew 11:29

[36] Mark 9:35; 10:44

[37] James 4:6;1 Peter 5:5

[38] Fifty years later, the answer to this prayer was evidenced when the Rev Richard Cecil, preaching at Newton's Funeral Service, took as his text Luke 12:42-43, *And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.*

[39] Philip Henry, father of Bible commentator Matthew Henry, was affectionately known as "Heavenly Henry": *The Life of the Rev Philip Henry*, Matthew Henry, 1698.

[40] Hebrews 5:12-14

[41] John 16:12

[42] See also Newton's Preface to *Olney Hymns*, 1799: "They should be Hymns, not Odes, if designed for public worship, and for the use of plain people. Perspicuity, simplicity and ease, should be chiefly attended to; and the imagery and colouring of poetry, if admitted at all, should be indulged very sparingly and with great judgment".

[43] Luke 10:39

[44] 1 John 1:1

[45] Similarly expressed in Newton's Preface to *Olney Hymns*, 1799: "I am not conscious of having written a single line with an intention, either to flatter, or to offend any party or person upon earth. I have simply declared my own views and feelings, as I might have done if I had composed hymns in some of the newly discovered islands in the South-Sea, where no person had any knowledge of the name of Jesus, but myself".

[46] From Newton's diary: "3-4 August 1800: Thus far thou hast brought me — and now I am old and grey-headed I trust thou wilt not forsake me… And my worthless name has been known, by thy blessing on my pen, and on my ministry, far and near. I now again deliberately and cheerfully devote myself to thee, but in dependence upon thy strength, for without thee I can do nothing." Lambeth Palace Library, MS 2943

[47] Psalm 103:2

[48] a reference to Ezekiel 16:6

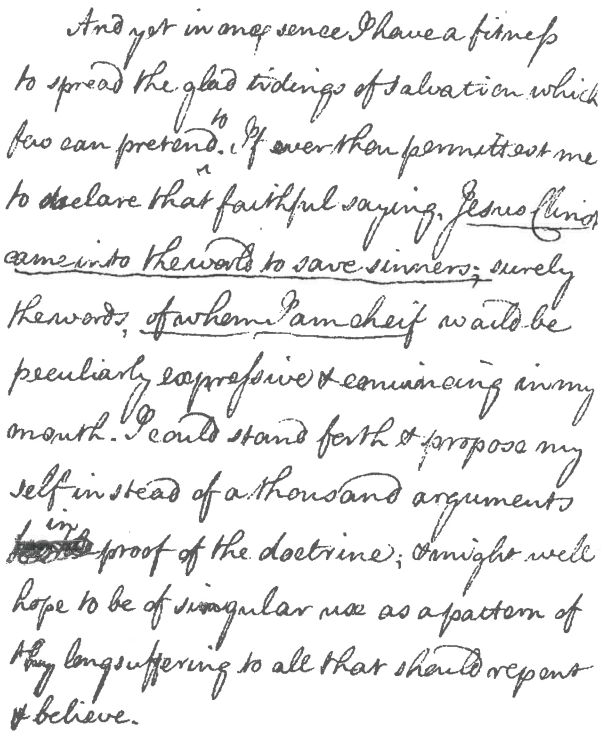
[49] Newton later published an account of this experience of God's grace in the storm at sea in his *Authentic Narrative*, 1764. As he later wrote in his hymn, *Amazing Grace*, "how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed".

[See also his sermon notes at http://www.johnnewton.org/Group/Group.aspx?id=32665: "the never to be forgotten hour when he enabled us to hope in his mercy".]

[50] Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come.
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far …

[51] 1 Corinthians 15:43

[52] James 4:6


And yet in one sence I have a fitness to spread the glad tidings of salvation which few can pretend to. If ever thou permittest me to declare that faithful saying, Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; surely the words, of whom I am chief would be peculiarly expressive & convincing in my mouth. I could stand forth & propose my self instead of a thousand arguments in proof of the doctrine; & might well hope to be of singular use as a pattern of thy longsuffering to all that should repent & believe.

Commendations

"'Miscellaneous Thoughts' is a remarkable document clearly demonstrating the profound theological and vocational seriousness that Newton was devoting to every aspect of his calling. Considering that its author had never attended any sort of Bible college, seminary, or university course in theology, the journal displays a high degree of biblical knowledge and spiritual maturity. It also reveals a deep humility in Newton, whose self-examination concluded in a decisive commitment to surrender himself to God's service. Any candidate for an ordained ministry in the twenty-first century could well profit from studying the process John Newton put himself through two hundred and fifty years ago, in 'Miscellaneous Thoughts'."
Jonathan Aitken, author "John Newton: From Disgrace to Amazing Grace"

"John Newton's life and ministry constitute one of the most inspiring Christian stories of all time. Having experienced Amazing Grace, he was able to preach, teach and write about this and reflect it in all of his ministry. John Newton's reflections therefore on the nature and execution of Christian ministry remain as relevant today as they were during his own moment in history. The opportunity through this venture to sit at his feet once again is not one which should be missed."
Michael Cassidy, Founder and International Team Leader, African Enterprise

"As I am seeking to enter the pastoral ministry, I was given a copy of Newton's 'Thoughts' to read. I found them both challenging and humbling, yet at the same time encouraging and inspiring. Newton said it well: *Who is sufficient for these things?*"
Ben Hutton, prospective ministerial student, Kent

"John Newton's letter on 'A Call to the ministry' is about the best human guidance you can get on this subject so his expanded 'Thoughts' are just blessing on blessing. To dedicate this to Tim Hoare who gave about the wisest support and kindness to those in the ministry is a joy to see."
Simon Manchester, Rector St Thomas' Church, North Sydney

"Even the smallest knowledge of John Newton makes us long to be like him! To have his balanced blend of personal and doctrinal purity; to see, as he did, sinners won for Christ, saints edified, and fellowships gathered; to have that composed largeness of mind that holds in unity denominational and personal conviction alongside undenominational and respectful loving and active oneness with all who exalt the word of God, preach the gospel of Christ crucified, and love the person, work, and name of Jesus. Newton's 'Miscellaneous Thoughts' cannot but move every reader on in such longings. He writes, of course, in the spacious style of his day, but with compelling clarity. His 'seriousness' — a serious mind, not a dullness of spirit, emotion or expression — rebukes all shallowness or thoughtless haste as we enter upon divine things or Christian service. In these pages a man of deep spirituality, wide scriptural knowledge, and an unusual depth of longing to serve God ponders the nature of a true calling, the proper balancing of urgency to 'get going' and patient preparation for the Lord's signal, the place and nature of necessary gifts, and the objectives at which our ministry should constantly aim. These thoughts should be required reading for all Christians in the light of our common calling to holy living and holy testimony, but specially for those who are given the unspeakable privilege of 'full-time service', whether they are in their early days, or, like me, wishing I had read these miscellaneous thoughts sixty years ago."
Alec Motyer, formerly Principal Trinity Theological College, Bristol

"How unworthy and unlikely was I to preach that faith which I had renounced and scorned! What difficulties were in the way, which thou only couldst remove. But thou didst it; and hast now supported me in it thirty-eight years, restraining me from those evils and errors which might have hurt my character and prevented my usefulness, and from which, nothing short of thy power and grace could restrain a heart so vile as mine."
John Newton, Rector St Mary Woolnoth, London, 4 August 1802

"It is hard to believe that any Christians, wondering if God was calling them to ordained service, ever meditated on relevant Scriptures so perceptively, and recorded their discernments so luminously, as did John Newton. His journaling of his journey towards vocational certainty is a very precious part of the legacy of this great man of God."
James I Packer, Board of Governors' Professor of Theology, Regent College, Vancouver

"Last year, during Oak Hill's weekly faculty meeting, I recommended the draft online version of Newton's 'Miscellaneous Thoughts' to my colleagues, so now I'm particularly delighted to see it available in print. What are the differences 'between a minister and a private Christian'? How may one discern a true call from the Lord? Which gifts of character and skill are most necessary to 'ordained' ministry? Newton's 'Thoughts' on these subjects are full of biblical wisdom, personal humility, and godly common sense. They remind us that our Lord's power 'is made perfect in weakness', and encourage us to pray with Newton, 'Canst thou not turn me and mould me, frame me and strengthen me as thou wilt?'
The author may be long since gone to glory, but the issues are still very live ones. This little booklet would make an excellent gift for anyone considering or about to enter life 'in the ministry'. It would provide a spiritual stimulant for anyone already committed to such a life."
Marian Raikes, Dean of Women and Pastoral Studies, Chaplain, Oak Hill Theological College, London

"I have benefited personally very significantly from reading both the writings of John Newton and biographies of his life. I was delighted to hear of 'Miscellaneous Thoughts' and its publication. 'Miscellaneous Thoughts' contains many of Newton's reflections on what it means to consider and be immersed in the Lord's service. It will provide deep encouragement and enabling both for those thinking about the ministry and those engaged in it. I am sure it will be of great benefit to many."
William Taylor, Rector St Helen's Bishopsgate, London